

Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project
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Lorene Mulrooney
Journeyman Electrician, Seattle
Member, IBEW Local 46

Interviewee: Lorene Mulrooney

Interviewers: Conor Casey

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CONOR CASEY 00:00:28: Good afternoon. This is the "Working in the Time of COVID Oral History Project." Today we're going to be interviewing Lorene Mulrooney, who is a worker and a member of IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers]; the electrical workers union, Local 46. Today is August 27, 2020. It's 4:07 p.m. I'm in Seattle. Are you in Seattle, too, Lorene?

LORENE MULROONEY 00:00:53: I'm in Seattle! I'm in Queen Anne!

CONOR 00:00:58: I just wanted to make sure that it's okay with you that we record this interview and that you become part of the project?

LORENE 00:01:05: Yes, absolutely.

CONOR 00:01:06: Cool. Thank you. I wonder first if you might be able to say your name and spell it out for us?

LORENE 00:01:15: My name is Lorene Mulrooney, and it is spelled L-o-r-e-n-e last name M-u-l-r-o-o-n-e-y.

CONOR 00:01:28: Okay, thanks. And would you mind saying how old you are, what your birthdate is, and where you were born?

LORENE 00:01:36: I was born in Santa Barbara, California on November 23, 1983.

CONOR 00:01:43: Great, thank you. And what is—Can you say your gender and what your preferred pronouns are?

LORENE 00:01:54: She/her.

CONOR 00:01:57: Okay. And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?

LORENE 00:02:04: Caucasian, white.

CONOR 00:02:06: Okay. And could you say where you live right now?

LORENE 00:02:10: I live in Seattle, Washington.

CONOR 00:02:12: Okay, thanks. Thank you. And just to explain, that will help us because, a lot of times, folks, when they're looking at interviews, they will be looking at stuff relating to particular trades. But increasingly, a lot of the ways people do research in history is they're really interested in people's gender presentation, their race and ethnicity, where they're from, what their generational thing is. So people use these oral histories in ways that we can't always anticipate. And so that's one of the reasons why we're just trying to get this out there. We also don't want to assume it because you know, sometimes if you assume stuff based on how people perceive your presentation, you normalize it. So, that's why we're asking.

LORENE 00:02:47: Mm-hmm.

CONOR 00:02:48: I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what your job is and how long you've been doing it?

LORENE 00:02:55: So, I am a journeyman electrician. I've been doing it for seven years. However, five of that was the apprenticeship program. I'm an inside wireman, so I basically do commercial work—commercial/industrial—though I done very little industrial and it's all high voltage. So, 277, 480 and, mostly, I do high rises, offices, condos. I've done kitchens, like food service. I've been all over the city and surrounding areas doing electrical work.

CONOR 00:03:44: And how many years have you been in the apprenticeship program, and how long have you been turned out as a tradesperson?

LORENE 00:03:49: So the apprenticeship was five years and then it's been almost two years since I got my journeyman's card.

CONOR 00:03:58: Cool. Thanks. So—and then you're a member of IBEW 46, is that correct? You went through that apprenticeship?

LORENE 00:04:06: Yeah.

CONOR 00:04:06: Okay.

LORENE 00:04:07: Local 46!

CONOR 00:04:09: Okay, and— they have that apprenticeship program so that you kind of went through that whole process, and that's how you get turned out on the jobs.

LORENE 00:04:18: Yeah. Like a lot of people, I didn't really come into the trades having any background at all. I did welding at U Dub [University of Washington]. Actually, I did sculpture, but welding—metal fabrication was my medium. Outside of that— I didn't know how to use a pair of channel locks, for example. So the apprenticeship program was really helpful for me and then— you know, most people that do come in into it, though, generally have a background of some sort, like maybe they were in the military doing electrical or their grandpa owned a business and whatever the situation may be. So the apprenticeship was really helpful in teaching a lot of different aspects of trades and, also, you know how electricity works. That's good to know! *(laughs)*

CONOR 00:05:16: You all have like a dispatch system through the union, right? Is that how you get work?

LORENE 00:05:22: Yeah.

CONOR 00:05:23: Okay. I'm wondering about that job, and I don't want to answer the question, but I'm wondering: how has it been impacted by the pandemic? Since we've had this shelter in place since March, have you gained or lost hours? How has that been basically impacted by your workload? I know there's a seasonality to the work as it is.

LORENE 00:05:47: So I took this job on the fifth of February [2020] and it was right before lockdown happened and, maybe for about a week, we were doing 40 hours and then they ramped it up to 50 hours. Yeah, 10 hour days! And we were starting at 4 a.m. So 4 to 2:30. That we were doing until lockdown happened, which was late March, I believe.

So, yeah, that was rough getting up at 2:30 in the morning to go to work! So our workload didn't change, but because of lockdown we shut the whole jobsite down. Everybody went home. Nobody worked there for—I believe—about a month and then people started to trickle back in. So I personally didn't work for six weeks. I was off. And then my general foreman called me and was like, "You know, Governor Inslee said, we can open up again, so do you want to come back to work?"

I was really bored so, of course, I was really excited to go back to work. But because of all of that, we've just been working 40 hours, no overtime, and they've just extended the due dates, for things, essentially. So the time that my floor is supposed to be turned over is November. And it originally was September so they just gave us more time. I mean, because what else can you do? They can't force you know, we can't work overtime because of the pandemic so we're not going to be able to catch up. So now things are pretty chill, actually, that they've been given us more time.

CONOR 00:07:44: Was the reason it got shut down because— I'm trying to remember— I know that there was a "shelter in place" order, but I know that there was a different interpretation by different building contractors on whether that included construction or not, and so I wonder how that played out for you.

LORENE 00:08:00: Yeah. That was a huge question. Because the job that I'm on right now is an office building where everybody's [in the company the building will house] working from home anyway, it is non essential. And so by default, we had to shut down because it wasn't a hospital or something, you know, vital to the economy at the time.

CONOR 00:08:33: Yeah, that's a weird subtlety in that it was not essential maybe because the industry that you're working on, in terms of the office workers, could work from home.

LORENE 00:08:45: Exactly!

CONOR 00:08:46: Yeah...

LORENE 00:08:47: Well, it's funny—when we started back up, I'm like, "Why rush to finish this office building? No one's gonna come into it!" (*laughs*)

CONOR 00:08:55: Yeah! (*laughs*) When it did come up, how did people address the concerns that related to their health or having personal protective equipment? Was that a concern? Or how did it play out? Because there are a lot of different interpretations there about how people reacted to it and whether they thought was necessary.

LORENE 00:09:20: Yeah. So, the contractor on my job site started having the Sanicans [portable toilets] cleaned every other day, and they set up those hand wash stations that you pump with your foot, hand sanitizer everywhere, like everywhere, and we all had to wear masks, of course, in addition to our safety glasses, hard hats, vests, gloves, always gloves. In the break room, we have card tables, and they're about six feet long. So, there's one person on each end of the card table so we're six feet apart in the break room and hand sanitizer there. They took away the microwaves and refrigerators. So, there's none of that. So, we essentially had no running water and no way to keep our food cold or heat it up which is inconvenient but doable. I mean we still deal with it. I would just eat warm salad every day. And then they actually have their own people—the contractors' own people will go around, constantly taking out the trash, sanitizing all the elevators and the knobs to doors and everything. And then my company would have apprentices go around— like a first year apprentice or something— go around and sanitize all of my company's stuff. So all the gang boxes, the scissor lifts, the tools, the carts. I mean: I saw an apprentice trying to clean some MC, which is a wire with a metal clad cable around it. And I'm like, "I don't know if there's COVID on it." I mean, I appreciate the effort, but it was kind of a moot point.

So there's just constantly people cleaning when we first got back. Since then, it has just gone like [makes sputtering sound with mouth indicating descent] totally downhill. Apprentices don't clean anymore. My company— They clean— I don't know how often they clean the Sanicans now. I think they went back to twice a week. We still have our handwash stations and we still don't have a microwave or refrigerator. But they laid probably 80% of the company off on this job. So people— There's not a lot of work anyway, so they wanted to just get rid of people. I think maybe— Yeah, like 20% of the people left over are still there but it's just, we have to wear N-95 masks mandatory, like no cloth masks or anything. It's changed from being super serious to being less

concerned about it. I mean, the contractor got rid of the hand sanitizer, and I was told it was because they didn't want to pay for it anymore. It's all about money. You know, at the end of the day, I kind of feel like people don't care, unfortunately. And so I have my own hand sanitizer that I bring, so I'm not really worried about it and I'm not concerned about catching it because I'm diligent.

CONOR 00:13:10: Have you noticed any of your other coworkers bringing their own protective equipment like N-95 masks or sanitizer because of the lack of that now?

LORENE 00:13:21: A lot of people do bring their own N-95s because the ones that my company provides are kind of uncomfortable. So people have been buying N-95 masks off Amazon or wherever. And some people have their own hand sanitizer, but I think for the most part, they feel safe enough in our environment, especially with having so little people now that they don't need to bring their own hand sanitizer. Or maybe some people do and I just don't know about it, but from what I've seen, I haven't seen a lot of people bringing their own stuff at all as far as that's concerned.

CONOR 00:14:02: You mentioned that there was kind of a big layoff. Is that because that was just kind of how it goes on a big job where there's a phased in and out, or do you think it was because of the pandemic that people got laid off?

LORENE 00:14:14: I think it's a little bit of both. And, they won't tell you this, but I think they laid off a lot of people that were afraid to come back to work. And so they say you have— They told us you have a choice to stay home or you can come to work, with no repercussions, But lo and behold, a couple weeks later, they're getting laid off. There's a lot of non-transparency with this situation. And I really don't believe that— I feel like people who stayed home did get laid off specifically, even though they won't ever tell you that, but they are so particular about doing anything for the job and for your company—being a "company man," if you will, and people who stayed home weren't "company men," so we don't want them here, right? That's kind of the mentality, at least on this job.

CONOR 00:15:22: Do you know if the union pushed back or tried to grieve any of that? Because that seems like it's something where— A lot of times union contracts cover wages, but also health and safety, but it's hard to prove it sometimes. Do you know if anybody's been grieving it?

LORENE 00:15:37: Not that I know of. I don't think that anybody has complained. It's not really the best job I've been on before so I think when some people got laid off, they were kind of like: "good riddance!" But like I said, no one's ever going to say, "We're laying you off because you decided to stay home." because the workload did decrease and that's not wrong, but you're just kind of more—

I don't know— If you have your own opinions and thoughts about stuff and you vocalize them, you're going to be in trouble with the boss kind of thing, unfortunately.

CONOR 00:16:18: Gotcha. Do I understand right that the kind of structure of it is that there's an overall contractor that organizes the entire build job, and then there are other companies that work doing specific things and then there's also a bunch of different workers from different trades that are all kind of coming in and working at the same time or going out in different phases?

LORENE 00:16:38: Yep.

CONOR 00:16:39: Okay.

LORENE 00:16:41: You have your contractor, which is, like you said, running the jobs, the job and have they have their own people and then you have the subcontractors: You have your electricians, and your framers, and your painters, and your HVAC people, and your pipe fitters, and so there's a lot of different trades involved, a lot of people involved on the job on any jobsite.

CONOR 00:17:15: Did you all get any hazard pay based on the crisis?

LORENE 00:17:21: No, because we did shut down. So we didn't get any hazard pay. It was talked about amongst, you know, just us. Like, in the break room, we were: "Well, we should get hazard pay."

But, you know, we're working and there wasn't really too much to be concerned about. And when we were shut down, we were getting the \$600 extra on unemployment, which for us as journeyman electricians, if you don't count taxes, is still less than what we make in a week, but not by much, so it wasn't too bad.

CONOR 00:17:59: Oh, so that kind of leads to what I was going to ask you, too—asking whether you had access to any support services of the state or from the community in this time?

LORENE 00:18:11: Outside of unemployment and the extra \$600, nothing. I'm not married and have a bunch of kids, so I'm okay. My coworkers who do have kids and stuff—they were pretty much fine, anyway. Everybody was happy to be home and with their families for the first time.

CONOR 00:18:36: That's good. I'll circle back to that. That's an interesting point.

So how do you feel like— Can you compare? Is this like one of those double gate jobs where there's some non-union and some union workers or is it all union through and through?

LORENE 00:18:56: I think this job is all union.

CONOR 00:18:59: Okay. I was wondering if you happen to know— How you felt like being a union member compared to other people in the industry during the pandemic?

LORENE 00:19:11: You know, it's hard because— I'm not 100% sure because, now that I said that, I'm wondering if our painters on our job are union or not because I've worked with this company before and I recall—it was like two years ago, but I recall talking to a couple of painters and they were saying they were non-union.

CONOR 00:19:34: That's interesting, okay.

LORENE 00:19:36: As far as how that affected—I really have no, no idea, I feel like I've just skirted by through all the drama. I've just been on the outskirts, just not really participating. I don't have anything—nothing super dramatic, which is good, but (*laughs*)

CONOR 00:20:01: Well, do you feel like you've— Have you helped out any family, friends, neighbors or strangers or vice versa received help during this time?

LORENE 00:20:10: Outside of helping my parents— My parents are elderly, they live on Social Security. I wasn't able to see them, but I would send them money. But nothing financially changed for them too much because they're on social security and they get—they have their retirement and everything. I haven't really— No one's really been struggling really hard—aside from emotionally. Financially, most people that I know have not been struggling very hard because of the pandemic.

CONOR 00:20:54: Have you all supported each other emotionally by talking about what's going on?

LORENE 00:21:03: I think— I believe so, because I believe just by talking about it, it's therapeutic. It's when you don't talk about it and it all builds up inside and then you overanalyze, or you do whatever because emotions can be tricky, but they are fleeting. So I feel that it's been helpful talking to people about it, venting about, complaining about, stuff that we don't really need to complain about, but just to let it out. And that's with family, friends and coworkers.

CONOR 00:21:39: I know that there's sort of a seasonality to the way your year goes and working time and not working time, but I'm wondering, right now, what does an average day look like to you?

LORENE 00:21:55: You mean when I go to work, and when I— ? Oh, so, I go to work at [6:00]. I'm fortunate that I live a three minute drive from my job and there's free parking so I drive where I really should walk because I need the exercise, but you know, free parking. So I start at [six o'clock]. Another thing I forgot to mention was when we went back to work after the lockdown, and we entered phase one, and they let us go back, they staggered everybody's start times and break times. So I would start at six, and then some people would start at 6:15 and other people started at 6:30. And then the breaks would be that way too. So we weren't all congregated into a small area. So just recently, actually, they went back to everybody starting at six. So there's more people trying to leave work and come to work at the same time. So it gets a little chaotic, but I get there, I usually get there about 5:50 and then by the time we get off work, we're off at 2:30 but we walk out of there about 2:20 and it's been actually pretty chill. Like, there hasn't been a lot of drama just with work itself because a couple weeks ago, I would have said differently. (*laughs*) There was just a lot— My general foreman is not the best general foreman I've had and— Some things have been messed up. So it's been hard to go back and fix them this late in the game, but— That was very stressful, but now it seems like we're just on a roll installing some lights, essentially the drivers for some lights and have an apprentice, tell him what to do, we put up our drivers, then we go home, we don't have to take it with us. And then we go back and do it again the next day!

CONOR 00:24:13: One of the things you mentioned was about the hand sanitizer and how everyone's starting to maybe come a little bit closer together in terms of work, and how people have become a bit less worried about the personal protective equipment. I'm just curious: do you think it's that people are becoming more used to it? Are they getting exhausted? What do you think's going on there?

LORENE 00:24:39: I think that a lot of people thought it was overkill. I think a lot of people think, "Well, I don't know anybody that has COVID!"

So, it's kind of like "out of sight, out of mind." So because it hasn't affected them personally, they don't take it as seriously at work. 'Cause it doesn't exist, in a sense! I think now that there's just less people on the job, and we're just getting used to—what do we really need to sanitize versus sanitizing that MC I was telling you about—that's unnecessary. So I think there's some people who are based in reality and like, take their precautions by taking care of their own tools and making sure that they're not sharing things and whatnot. And then there are people that are just following the rules so they don't get kicked off the jobsite, like that's their main priority is to not getting kicked off the jobsite. So they'll wear the mask because prior to them saying, "We're going to kick you off the jobsite if you don't have a mask," people were pulling down their mask.

I mean, 'cause it's hot, especially when they put up the walls and they mud the walls and all the humidity, you're just dripping sweat and you're just standing there because, of course, there's no ventilation yet. They're still installing the ducts! (*laughs*) So it gets really uncomfortable working with the masks on. Your face starts to sweat. I mean, at this point, everybody's gotten used to it now and with the threat of getting thrown off the jobsite, I never see anybody with their mask pulled down.

CONOR 00:26:28: Wow, that's really evocative—the image of what people are experiencing. That gives a real picture about what it feels like to be in all that equipment! 'Cause you're already wearing a lot of protective equipment, right?

LORENE 00:26:39: Yeah, exactly, and work clothes just on their own— Like my Dickies pants? Those are hefty pants, and I wear hefty work boots and t-shirts, because they get destroyed at work. And so they have to be thick and so that's uncomfortable on its own, but then you throw on the vest, and the hardhat, and the mask, and the safety glasses and— It's just bulky, it's a lot. And so it's been kind of hard too because I even still have this problem where my safety glasses get fogged up because of my [N-95] mask and everybody was like, "Oh just put tape over it and then that won't happen."

Well, I'm allergic to the adhesive on tape and I know this because I've done this before. I've been through this and so I'm not going to put tape on my face because I'm allergic to it and so I just kind of have to deal with it. I move my safety glasses down my nose a little bit and I look like an elderly woman trying to read the paper! (*laughs*) And it works, but it's just constant. I'm constantly fidgeting with my safety glasses all day and my mask, and it's definitely taken away a lot of time for installing stuff and being productive at work. That's been a big thing too— When they were having the apprentices sanitize everything, the apprentice would probably spend about three hours a day! So they'd only be actually working five hours out of the day. The other three, they'd be sanitizing everything for everybody. So there's a lot of time loss there. It was that way for a lot of us when we first went back to the job, it was like, every day, I'd have to sanitize my scissor lift. Because, there's a night crew. Who knows if the night crew touched? So you'd be spending a lot of time cleaning tools and stuff. It just has gotten much less— There's a lot less stuff to do now. I think because we know that it's kind of— It's not useless. I don't I don't have a better word, though, but like "useless" to be cleaning your hammer every day. (*laughs*) No one else is using your hammer and I know you would leave it all there. You leave it there overnight, so you don't really know, but let's be realistic here.

CONOR 00:29:24: Yeah gotcha, yeah. So maybe everyone's kind of adjusting a little bit.

LORENE 00:29:28: Exactly. Yeah.

CONOR 00:29:30: Both in terms of your work life and just your personal life, what has been the things that really stood out as challenging about this particular time?

LORENE 00:29:41: With work is the lack of transparency. It really bothers me. I know that that's just how the game is, anyway. The fact that it's even a "game" is ridiculous, but that's just the industry. Recently, like two weeks ago recently—I have a friend who's a foreman and my jobsite has two towers, the North Tower and the South Tower, and I'm in the South Tower. I have a friend who's a foreman in the North Tower, and I went over there to grab something or whatever. And he told me, "Hey, this guy on our job in the North Tower, this electrician tested positive for COVID, but he was asymptomatic and he only was working with two specific people in the electrical room, so you probably weren't exposed."

Which is true because I'm in another tower. Anyway— But my company sent out a mass email to all the foremen that said that, "This person was infected. Tell your employees, tell your journeymen, tell the apprentices. We don't think that we're going to tell the other trades, though. So don't say anything to the other trades but just tell—" you know, my company's people that work for them.

So my foreman friend showed me this email, and I go back to my tower and I'm waiting for my foreman to tell all of us this stuff, and it's close to the end of the day. And I was like, "Are you going to make an announcement about this guy in the North Tower having COVID, or are we just gonna risk it?"

00:31:25 Because I didn't have any exposure to this person, but I don't know about my co-workers. I have no idea. I know that one of the apprentices was over there every day sanitizing stuff on that tower, so he could have been exposed. And once I brought it up, my foreman was like, "Oh, yeah, of course! Blah, blah, blah. I was just going to tell you."

And I'm like, "You weren't gonna say anything, were you?"

You know, like, he just wasn't— And I actually really liked him and he's a really great foreman, and he seems like a really nice guy, but it's just that lack of transparency right there. And I don't understand it, I don't understand— You don't know what your journeymen and apprentices have been doing. You need to tell us so we can decide for ourselves if we need to go get tested or if we need to quarantine or whatever the issue may be. And that has happened— There have been three people on my job site that have tested positive for COVID. Word gets around very quickly, of course, but I'm hearing it from another journeyman, not the higher-ups. The higher-ups are totally closed mouth, they're not saying anything about it and they're the ones that are in charge. They're supposed to be telling us these things and they're just not doing it. So they're not looking out for our best interest. And that makes me actually really angry! And if I wanted to, I could just pick up and leave. I don't have to be on this job. I will do that if it comes to it. If I feel like my health is at risk, and I have— My parents are elderly. If I go see them, even if I'm wearing a mask, if I go to their place or something, they could get sick, they would not make it. Everybody's

got— They've got family— Everybody's got somebody that is high risk and I just wish that my company and the contractor was forthright about this kind of information because they're gambling with people's lives, essentially.

CONOR 00:33:42: Yeah, it sounds like what you're doing is leveraging informal information networks that are on the job. Can you think beyond the COVID positives what people might have shared during this time, that way?

LORENE 00:33:59: You mean, just through word of mouth?

CONOR 00:34:02: Yeah. But particularly kind of around the pandemic, besides the just the positive tests?

LORENE 00:34:09: Well, the hand sanitizer thing that I told you—that the company took away because they didn't want to pay for it. The company announced “we're going to take it away,” but then a coworker said it was because they don't want to pay for it. So I don't know if that was the fact or not. They're a multi-million dollar company. They can't afford hand sanitizer? I can't imagine that it's that expensive. I know there's a lot of us but—I don't know. I'm trying to think of other instances. We gossip about stuff all the time and it's just little things, so— In regards to the pandemic, I can't think of anything. It might come to me later.

CONOR 00:35:11: Okay, thanks. Have you had any positive experiences that have jumped out at you?

LORENE 00:35:22: Um— (long pause) I can't. I mean— I really like my foreman a lot. And for the most part, he is pretty transparent, except for that time I just mentioned recently. And he's been a beacon of clarity when people are trying to shove everything under the rug. So working with him has been nice and that's actually kind of the only reason I'm still on this job because I'm really unhappy. That happens from time to time. But there isn't anything specifically that I can think of outside of having my foreman be a decent human being. I don't really feel— I've gotten in an argument with a safety guy over my safety glasses getting fogged up. Basically, I was talking to my apprentice, we're standing in the hallway. I lift up my safety glasses because they're fogging up and I can't see him. I'm not doing any work, I'm trying to lay him out on what to do. And the safety guy comes by and just starts yelling at me to put my safety glasses on and I'm like, “I can't see!”

And he was like, “That's no excuse!”

And then it just went from there because I was already in a bad mood so I just started screaming at him and he just started screaming at me and—

What I did was unprofessional, but he also did something unprofessional and it's just— [breathes in] tensions have been so high and everybody's on edge, and it's just kind of been a nightmare situation trying to deal with everybody and everybody's got their own personal lives and stuff going on. And you don't know what that is and then they come to work, and then they freak out on you because your safety glasses aren't on! And it's just— It's all been not really positive. It's been a pretty negative experience and, hopefully, I just forget about it in the future. This never happened (*laughs*)

CONOR 00:37:33: How about in your personal life, if you're comfortable talking about that? Have you had any positive things that came out of the pandemic?

LORENE 00:37:41: Yeah—it was nice having some time off. Although, I have to say I was— I didn't work for three months. I was traveling, I come back at the end of January, start work the beginning of February, work for about six weeks, then I don't work for six weeks! So I'm pretty lucky that I just haven't been working. *(laughs)* I just was enjoying my time. But I was getting really bored especially because I love not working, everybody does, but normally I go see my friends or I go out to eat or go to a show or do something. Being trapped at home was not really the best.

I did—right before lockdown happened— I met my current partner at a bar, at Revolver. And so he's kind of my "pandemic partner" *(laughs)* and I'm very thankful and I'm—not expecting the relationship to work out, because I— I didn't have my hopes up or anything, but it's been going really well. We've been getting to know each other in odd ways, because we can't go out and do normal things like normal couples do, 'cause everything's closed. So, it's been interesting, and I'm so thankful that he's been there because I live alone. Otherwise, I would be stuck by myself; I wouldn't be able to see my parents, I can't see my friends, and so him and I kind of quarantined together. He would come over to my place for a weekend and the next week and I go over and quarantine at his place. And so that gave me some sanity. You know, I'm concerned like— I am bipolar, and so my mental health is very fragile, and I really wonder what it would be like if I was stuck in my apartment by myself for that long. I might have gone crazy or sunk into a horrible deep depression and thankfully I didn't during lockdown when I was stuck here. Um— But yeah: It's been a wild ride! *(laughs)* It's been a wild ride, and I definitely feel for the first time in my life that I'm actually getting my money's worth of rent, because you pay so much in rent and then you're not home half the time because you're at work! *(laughs)* So I actually feel like, "You know what? This is really worth the money!" *(laughs)*

CONOR 00:40:47: *(laughing)* Yeah, my electrical bill is like double what it was last year at this time!

LORENE 00:40:53: Totally. It's definitely— *(laughs)* The bills are much higher, but it's worth it. *(laughing)*

CONOR 00:41:03: Has anything about this time surprised you?

LORENE 00:41:11: I'm just surprised that it happened! I mean—the whole global pandemic. And if I had stayed in Fiji for like another week or two, I would have been stuck over there. [in a mock-dramatic tone] Oh, no! *(laughs)*

But that's bizarre to think about. It's so bizarre to think about, that this is the entire world. This isn't just our little special area in Seattle or America. This is the whole world: Every country everywhere is having this issue. To think about it on a global level, to me, is kind of mind-blowing, because I just haven't—Nothing like this has really happened in my lifetime, in my 36 years on this planet, so it's just— Watching it unfold and how different countries are reacting to things and how different people are reacting in their countries and it's kind of putting a damper on my travel plans for this winter. So fingers crossed that the pandemic is over by November *(laughs)* 'cause I need to go to South America! *(laughs)* But we'll see about that!

CONOR 00:42:30: It doesn't sound like you were sick. Do you know anybody, any of your friends or family— Did they get sick from COVID?

LORENE 00:42:37: No, I literally know nobody. And I don't know anybody that knows anybody that got it. Outside of the people at work, I should say, but I didn't even know those people. I just saw them in passing, you know, and so it's been kind of "out of sight out of mind" for me except for the fact that I do know it exists and I'm not going to put anybody else at risk or myself at risk. So even though I haven't seen the terrible repercussions of it, that doesn't mean I'm not going to protect myself and pretend that it's not there.

CONOR 00:43:18: I think you kind of touched on this next question. It's about whether you were quarantined. It sounds like— Is it correct that you were quarantined for about six weeks?

LORENE 00:43:26: Yes.

CONOR 00:43:26: Okay. You mentioned this a little bit, but how has it changed over time? What's it been like?

LORENE 00:43:35: The quarantine? Between like—wait from when I was in quarantine or to now?

CONOR 00:43:43: Yeah, 'cause it's like you're semi-quarantined in that you're not able to go out or doing a bunch of social events. But—

LORENE 00:43:49: Right.

CONOR 00:43:50: I'm trying to think about that six week block where you probably were home all the time.

LORENE 00:43:54: Yeah.

CONOR 00:43:55: Yeah.

LORENE 00:43:56: Well, I definitely really didn't see anybody for those six weeks besides my partner, and then— I did do a couple social distanced walks in the park with my best friend. And right before we knew lockdown was going to happen, I had another friend and her brother and stuff, we had a barbecue and we just drink some beers and had our last like, "We're about to go and lock down, so it was nice knowing you!"

But now— I'm going camping this weekend with a group of friends and socially distanced, we'll have our camping chairs, six feet apart and all that stuff and but I went and floated the Snoqualmie River the other weekend and I'm able to get out and do more things with friends. Not enough. Not near what I'm used to doing, but I'm getting more social little by little.

CONOR 00:45:01: Did you ever feel worried that you might lose your housing or your housing situation might get complicated by the pandemic?

LORENE 00:45:09: No, I feel incredibly fortunate. I've never been worried about my housing, my job. Some of the reason for this actually is the union. And it's because—I know it's different in a pandemic, so I don't know how this would work, but my union has a benevolent fund. I got really sick a few years ago, and was in the hospital and then I couldn't work for a couple months, because I got pneumonia and my lung collapsed. And so my union started paying my rent, they paid all my bills, they gave me money for gas and food—like gas card and

food card for Safeway. So, they really helped me when I was physically unable to work. And it gave me a sense of security and knowing that in the future if something terrible happens like that, that my union will have my back. And so I kind of felt that way with the pandemic. I don't know how the union can have thousands of people's backs at once, if, like, we all lost our housing, but there is something in place.

CONOR 00:46:35: Yeah, no doubt. How do you think your life or just life in general will be different after all this?

LORENE 00:46:45: Well, so I travel every winter, and I'm concerned that—so this winter I want to go to South America, there's eight countries in South America I want to go to and there was this big eclipse festival down in Argentina, in the Patagonia region, because there's a total eclipse happening in December, in mid-December. So I was going to go and get a yurt and go to this festival in Argentina and watch the solar—the total eclipse. And it's like a week long festival. And then it was going to go to Chile and Uruguay and Brazil and Peru and Venez—but I mean, all over the place all over the continent.

00:47:33 So traveling is my thing that makes me happy. It's the best experience. Even when things are hard and difficult when you're traveling because chaos happens a lot, it's still— There's this sense of wonder, everything's new and everything is exciting and you're learning so much that all those other little things like that bother you on a regular basis. And you're working your 40 hour work week, totally gone! There's no negative thoughts, there's no depressive thoughts, there's no stress about how am I going to pay the bill? And how am I gonna— It's just the ultimate relaxation for me. And so I'm really concerned that that's not going to happen—that in September, Chile and Argentina are going to re-evaluate their lockdown. And so they're going to lock down for another 90 days or they're going to open up their borders. So, who knows?

00:48:39 What that means for me is that I either go someplace else, or I just keep working, which I don't want to do because I like not being here in the wintertime because the weather's so terrible, and I don't like it. *(laughs)* I don't mind a little bit of rain, but you know, it rains every day and it's dark. All day long. You get like four hours of light in the wintertime here. It's very, very difficult to live in. And so I don't know what's going to happen. The uncertainty is kind of stressful just because I don't want to stay here. So I'm thinking about Plan B and like maybe there's another country that will be open that I could go to because it's a big world and there's a lot of places I haven't been to yet so if I don't go to South America this year I can always go next year, whenever and maybe I'll go visit Indonesia or something. I don't know. I do need to figure that out, though. So it's hard to book things for the trip. It's hard to book flights. I haven't lost any money yet, but I might because things are getting canceled.

00:49:53 It's just really disappointing. And I'm lucky that I do have friends and family here and a support system here. So it's not like it would be the end of the world if I don't get to go on my trip—first world problems, right? Outside of that, I don't really see my life changing too much aside from I spend more time with myself than I used to. And I miss people.

So yeah, I feel pretty lucky through the situation just reading about other people who've, like, lost jobs, and then they lose their house, and then they can't even feed their kids and are living out of their car. And so I'm incredibly fortunate.

CONOR 00:50:45: Yeah, thanks. I'm wondering whether you have any other thoughts that you'd like to share or have I missed anything that you feel is important to talk about?

LORENE 00:51:02: I don't know. I guess my thing is that nobody knows how to deal with this pandemic, no matter what you do for a living, who you are, what your race is, where you li—Nobody, nobody knows how to deal with it. So it's, it's kind of one day at a time.

00:51:26 And I feel that some people are doing a good job taking care of their community and other people aren't. But I also don't blame them because there's no precedent—you're just kind of like, “well, this might be a good idea so we'll try this, and then if it doesn't work out—” I mean, trial and error and I hope that there's never another pandemic, but at least next time if there is, we have better a better way to deal with it, better routine or strategy to deal with it and make sure everybody's safe and taken care of and no one's homeless and living out of their car with their kids, or whatever the situation may be.

00:52:13 Yeah, it's been strange, a very strange experience, a strange part of my life. And I had a fortune teller in India read my palm a couple of years ago and he told me that like this was going to be the best year and this is going to be—2020 is just going to be hands down one of the best years of my life. And I'm not saying it was bad, but it's weird, and I can't do anything. And I'm like— he was wrong or is just going to get worse for me? What does that mean? So, I guess nobody can predict the pandemic, right? A pandemic.

Yeah. Like I said, one day at a time.

CONOR 00:53:07: Well, cool. Thank you so much. I'll stop the recording. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk and keep talking. I'll just stop the recording.